

## Causes of Bodhicitta

### Four causes of Bodhicitta:

Tibetan: ལྷ་བཞི། - *Gyu Zhi* (*Gyu* = cause, *Zhi* = four)

With these four causes one's Bodhicitta will be powerful and one will easily engage in the various Bodhisattva activities. The four causes are:

1. Having an excellent lineage: Some explain this to refer to the family into which one is born. If one is born into an excellent family, one will be provided with the necessary conditions for spiritual development. Others explain an excellent lineage to refer to an excellent disposition, i.e. a strong affinity and interest to practice the Mahayana teachings.
2. Relying on a properly qualified teacher who teaches and inspires one to cultivate Bodhicitta and practice the path.
3. Naturally having compassion for other sentient beings.
4. Not being disheartened by the difficulties of Samsara. There can be a lot of adversity and obstacles when working for the benefit of others. However, the Buddha explained that the Arhats' experience of joy when they attain self-liberation cannot compare to the joy the Bodhisattvas experience even when they undergo hardships while working for the welfare of other sentient beings.

### Four conditions of Bodhicitta:

Tibetan: ལྷ་བཞི། - *Kyen Zhi* (*Kyen* = condition, *Zhi* = four)

The four conditions of Bodhicitta that are taught in various sutras refer to four different circumstances through which Bodhicitta may arise. However, when Bodhicitta arises *only* in dependence on any of these circumstances it is not complete but *nominal* Bodhicitta. The reason for this is that the aspiration to attain enlightenment that arises from any of these conditions is not an aspiration to be of benefit to others founded on great love and compassion. Therefore, we can only loosely refer to them as the causes for Bodhicitta. However, by mainly relying on the principal causes for generating Bodhicitta (*the sevenfold cause and effect instruction and equalizing and exchanging self for others*, which will be explained below) these four conditions may serve as indirect causes assisting the practitioner in the cultivation of Bodhicitta. The four conditions are:

1. Directly seeing or hearing from others about the inconceivable power of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and other highly realized beings and aspiring to obtain the same wonderful qualities oneself.
2. Although not having seen or heard about such power in this way, one reads or listens to teachings that describe enlightenment, etc. In dependence on those teachings one generates faith and admiration and aspires to attain the same state.
3. Despite not having studied or listened to the teachings, one becomes aware that the Mahayana teachings are disappearing from this world. Further, understanding that the Dharma can truly benefit others one aspires to attain enlightenment so that the teachings will continue to exist for a long time.

Even though here one finds it unbearable that the method that sentient beings use to attain freedom will soon vanish, the primary motivation is not great compassion but distress over the disappearance of the Dharma.

4. Recognizing that these are degenerate times and that it is rare for anyone to aspire even to self-liberation, let alone to complete enlightenment, one generates Bodhicitta to set an example and to inspire others to engage in the Mahayana practices.

### Four strengths/powers/forces:

Tibetan: ལྷོ་བས་བཞི། - *Dob Zhi* (*Dob* = strength/power/force, *Zhi* = four)

There are also four strengths in dependence on which Bodhicitta can arise. Those four are:

1. One's own strength: aspiring to attain enlightenment through one's own extensive thought and initiative.
2. Others' strength: aspiring to attain enlightenment through others' inspiration and encouragement.
3. Strength of the cause: causes created in former lives by having engaged in Mahayana practices that left predispositions for them. Therefore, as soon as one hears about the Buddha or Bodhisattvas in this life one naturally generates the inclination to attain enlightenment.
4. Strength of application: even if one does not have any predispositions of Mahayana practice from a previous life, making an effort in this life to apply the instructions of a spiritual teacher, contemplate and meditate on them until one will eventually be able to generate Bodhicitta.

Asanga taught the four causes, four conditions and four powers in his *Bodhisattva Bhumi*. The various ways in which these causes, conditions and strengths are practiced in combination result in different degrees of stability of Bodhicitta. In general, the four conditions and four causes in combination with the first strength (one's own strength) or the third strength (the strength of the cause or predispositions) will result in strong and stable Bodhicitta. When they are combined with the second strength (other's strength) or the fourth strength (strength of application) Bodhicitta will be less stable. However, with continuous practice the latter Bodhicitta will eventually also become firm and stable.

### Two principal causes

There are two principal causes or two techniques for generating Bodhicitta. Those two techniques are explained separately but are combined in practice. Further, both must be preceded by equanimity.

1. The sevenfold cause and effect instruction

Tibetan: ལྷུ་འབྲས་མན་ངག་བརྟན། *Gyu Dre Men ngag Duen* (*Gyu* = cause, *Dre* = effect, *Men ngag* = instruction,

*Duen* = seven)

2. Equalizing and exchanging self for others

Tibetan: འདག་གཞན་མཉམ་བཞི། - *Dag Zhaen Nyam Je* (*Dag* = self, *Zhaen* = others, *Nyam* = equalize,

*Je* = exchange)

